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Subject: Surrey Downs news article

Two courtrooms, office still closed from PCB leak - Officials found other problems at day care during July inspection

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by David A. Grant

Journal Reporter

BELLEVUE -- Parts of a county-owned building in Bellevue remained closed Monday after an adjacent day-care center was shut down last week due to the discovery of hazardous chemicals and other unsafe conditions.

Surrydowns Childcare Center closed Aug. 17 after its license was suspended by the state Department of Social and Health Services due to the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, leaking from old fluorescent light fixtures, along with several other problems.

The day care remains closed and it's unknown when, if ever, it will reopen. Two parents told the Journal Monday they had received calls from a Surrydowns employee indicating the closure could be permanent.

Repeated calls to Debbie Coburn, the director of Surrydowns Children's Center, were not returned. Approximately 90 children attended the day care at the time of its closure.

Courtroom, probation office opened

In response to the problems at the day care, King County officials decided to close the courtrooms, administrative offices and a probation office Thursday and Friday for testing.

Elaine Kraft, a spokeswoman for King County, said Monday that Courtroom 3 and a Bellevue probation office were reopened Monday. However, two other courtrooms and an administrative office remain closed. She said testing over the weekend revealed "trace amounts" of PCBs.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, an acceptable level of PCBs is 50 parts per million. Preliminary tests by the EPA at the day care center showed levels ranging from 1,000 to 750,000 parts per

million.

"They decided to err on the side of caution and felt it best to remove the carpet," Kraft said of the district court facility. "When that is finished, they will reopen."

Cases being heard in other cities

While the courtrooms are closed, some Bellevue cases will be heard in courtrooms in Mercer Island and in Redmond. Kraft didn't know when the courtrooms would reopen or how much it will cost to upgrade the carpets.

Surrydowns is at 609 112th Ave. S.E. in a former Bellevue School District elementary school that was built in 1960 and purchased by the county in 1986. King County operates the court facility for the city of Bellevue in part of the complex.

Kraft said that attorneys for the county have been in touch with Coburn's lawyers to determine what her plan is, but so far it is not clear. The Journal was not able to verify information from parents of former day-care children that the closure could be permanent.

Day care receives complaints

The business, at the same location for more than 20 years, has drawn positive remarks from several parents for the family atmosphere and personal care given to children.

But after receiving complaints, officials with the state Department of Social and Health Services found several problems at Surrydowns during an inspection on June 18.

They included mold growth throughout the facility, unsanitary conditions, unsafe electrical outlets, improperly stored medications and improperly stored food. In mid-July the agency and county health official inspected the facility, then called in the EPA to take samples on Aug. 11.

PCBs, a mixture of chemicals that are still found in the environment because they do not biodegrade, were banned in 1977. Prior to that, they were commonly used as coolants in electrical equipment because they don't burn easily and are good insulators.

Adverse health effects related to PCBs include neurobehavioral and immunological changes in children, rashes and liver damage. They are known to cause cancer in animals.

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